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The Digital Dzonga and retailers have started an education campaign to inform consumers about digital terrestrial TV.

The recently-appointed Digital Dzonga Advisory Council will push an extensive education campaign to inform consumers about digital terrestrial TV (DTT).

Speaking at the official launch of the Dzonga yesterday, on Constitutional Hill, council chairperson Lara Kantor explained that one of the council's key objectives is to get consumers ready to "go digital".

The group is putting together a campaign that will begin with an FAQ and instructional video on what going digital will mean for the average South African TV viewer. Alongside the campaign, the Dzonga will accredit installers and test the equipment that is produced by manufacturers.

According to Kantor, this is all being done to ensure that consumers make the transition from analogue with as little trouble as possible.

Communications minister Sipiwe Nyanda says the department will fund the Dzonga's campaign. However, he says he will appeal to treasury for increased spend for DTT. "The public awareness campaign needs more funding."

The minister says SA now needs to work together for a smooth transition from analogue to digital. "I want to thank industry and labour for working together towards achieving a common goal."

Misinformed

The DTT education buzz has also hit retailers, which are gearing up for next year's commercial release of digital TV. This follows an earlier investigation conducted by ITWeb, exposing retail attendants who mistakenly informed consumers that certain TV sets could receive the digital signal without a set-top box.

Earlier this week, ITWeb randomly contacted three outlets and was told – incorrectly – at each store that high-definition televisions could receive the new digital signal. SA is in the midst of a dual-illumination process that will see the old analogue broadcast change over to a digital signal.

David Sussman, executive chairman of JD Group, says he hopes none of the group's staff are misinforming customers about the requirements to watch television when the new signal comes in. A training module is being prepared and will be running next month, he adds. The retail group, which owns HiFi Corporation and Incredible Connection, is just waiting for details on when the Sussman says the group also needs more detail on how long dual-illumination will continue.

At the moment, government plans to turn off the analogue signal in 2011, but there has been talk of extending this deadline to 2013. Internationally, the old-fashioned broadcast signal will be switched off in 2015.

The retail group will also put out advertising to educate consumers about the new requirements, Sussman says.

Clarity needed

Brian Leroni, group corporate affairs executive at Massmart, says full training sessions for all sales staff on the new television sets and set-top boxes will be conducted, and there will also be sign-posted shopper communications.

However, he says, the group – which owns Dion Wired, Game and Makro – is waiting for final details from the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the Independent Communications Authority of SA (ICASA) before starting training.

"We do not want to assume anything as far as ICASA and SABC goes on DTT, and risk ill-advising our customers," Leroni says. Two of the three stores polled by ITWeb belong to the Massmart group. Leroni says staff need to "be highlighting that playback is not possible without a set-top box".

